



Senator Feinstein Warns of Threat to Border Patrol Agents from .50-Caliber Sniper Rifles

- Easy-to-buy sniper rifle has mile-long range, could penetrate steel armor -

March 24, 2006

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) is urging Customs and Border Protection to assess the threat to border patrol agents should the easily available .50 caliber sniper rifle find its way into the hands of Mexican drug smugglers or other criminals.

“The threat posed by the easy availability of the .50-caliber sniper rifle could endanger our border patrol agents and hinder our ability to control our borders,” Senator Feinstein wrote in a letter to U.S. Customs and Border Protection Acting Commissioner Deborah Spero. **“Given the range and lethality of these weapons, how would the Border Patrol carry out its mission should these weapons be used by criminals, smugglers and human traffickers shooting across the border?”**

Following is the text of the letter Senators Feinstein sent to Commissioner Spero:

March 24, 2006

Deborah J. Spero
Acting Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Department of Homeland Security
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20229

Dear Commissioner Spero,

I write to bring to your attention a significant issue which I believe could endanger our border patrol agents, and hinder our ability to control our borders: the threat posed by the easy availability of the .50-Caliber Sniper Rifle.

At a recent hearing before the Committee on the Judiciary on the subject of border violence, Mr. Aguilar of the Border Patrol testified about the dangers posed by snipers, inside Mexico, shooting across the border at our officers. I asked him about whether analysis of this threat included the newest, and most dangerous, weapon in the sniper’s arsenal – the .50-caliber sniper gun. His answer left me with the impression that the threat had not been fully considered.

As you may know, the .50-caliber rifle is accurate at extreme long range: a skilled gunman can kill a man at more than a mile. That accuracy is coupled with extreme lethality, because the projectile is moving so fast, and is so heavy, that it can penetrate steel armor. In fact other elements of the Department of Homeland Security, notable the U.S. Coast Guard, now use the rifle because it can shoot through the engine block of fleeing smuggler “fast-boats.”

I have long been concerned about this issue, and have introduced legislation which would, at least in part, address the problem by treating these weapons under the same regulations that govern machine guns, rather than .22-caliber rifles as is presently the law.

I would greatly appreciate if you could advise me, as soon as possible, of the following. Has Customs and Border Protection assessed the threat faced from this weapon, and is so, what is the result of that assessment? What steps have been taken to protect Border Patrol agents from the treat? What steps are planned? Given the range and lethality of these weapons, how would the Border Patrol carry out its mission should these weapons be used by criminals, smugglers and human traffickers shooting across the border?

I look forward to your reply, and working together on this critical issue. I have enclosed some background material for your review.

Yours truly,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

###